

BLOGGER ROUNDTABLE WITH
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FOR STRATEGIC EFFECTS, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ

SUBJECT: OPERATIONS IN IRAQ

LOCATION: BAGHDAD, IRAQ AND THE PENTAGON, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

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THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT.

ADM. FOX: Okay, we're -- you know, the Operation Fard al-Qanun, which is the
Iraqi name for the Baghdad security plan, it's an Iraqi-conceived and Iraqi-led operation.
It's their plan. We are using their name for it basically. The big difference here in this is
the fact that the Iraqi security forces are clearly stepping up to a much higher visibility
and capability in the operation. We are in ongoing operations going throughout Baghdad
-- two of five brigade combat teams that are actually here in country operating in
Baghdad. The majority of an Infantry Division headquarters is here about to close. They

are probably at the 80 or 90 percent closure, if you will. And then we've got three more brigade combat teams that are headed this way. The third one is en route as we speak, and then the fourth and fifth will flow, essentially, in sequential months. And we'll have all of the forces that have been requested -- between 1,500 combat troops -- here in the latter part of May, beginning of June time frame.

In addition to the overall combat troops, there's approximately 7,000 additional troops -- aviation combat brigade, military police, logistics, intelligence, dog handlers and that sort of thing -- that is also kind of in the proportional combat support element -- as I said, logistics -- that would help service and support the overall additional combat capability.

So, we are looking at this in a very patient fashion. It's going to take us months, not days or weeks, for us actually to see the results or to have an opportunity to assess exactly how this is going. There are some encouraging signs, but we're also guarded about it, because the forces that are in flow. We don't have all the forces, as I mentioned before, and so we're not at the point where we feel like we can say okay, we've seen specific trends without the entire force employed.

The number of murders and kidnappings in Baghdad are down substantially in the last six weeks. The number of car bombs and some high visibility attacks in Baghdad proper still remain. And in fact, there have been outside of Baghdad there have been spectacular attacks. There was an extremely large VBIED, a vehicle born improvised explosive device, that was in a dump truck in Tall Afar yesterday. And so, that was a very high visibility attack. It killed a number of people -- over about 80 people and 140 injured -- up in Tall Afar north of here. There was a second VBIED dump truck that was stopped at a checkpoint and actually successfully prevented. We assess as we look at it, there was an attempt to bring a second dump truck in there and then hit the first responders responding to the explosion from the first VBIED.

We've seen recent -- in fact, there was recent attacks as well in Al Anbar yesterday. There was an attack against the government center with another VBIED type of attack with a chlorine bottle. So, we're seeing attempts to, you know, continue to inflict high numbers of casualties.

Are you there?

MODERATOR: Yes, sir, go ahead.

ADM. FOX: Okay. It sounded like we kind of blipped off for a second.

But we're also seeing the effectiveness of a more rigorous checkpoint regimen where we've seen more of these vehicle born improvised explosive devices actually stopped in the serpentine approach to some of these checkpoints where they've actually not even gotten through at all. So, still a mixed bag type of thing.

Of course, the actual significant changes that we're seeing in terms of how our operations are going in Baghdad -- in the previous Baghdad initiatives for improving security, our forces would go through and clear a neighborhood and then not hold it but move on to another neighborhood. And then the insurgents would just kind of flow behind us. It's hard to overstate how important this is. There's no longer -- any neighborhood that we operate and clear we retain. And so, there are coalition forces, Iraqi police and Iraqi army units that actually stay in those neighborhoods. They live there. We're establishing a number of stations -- joint security stations. There's 28 of them right now that essentially they're fortified compounds that have Iraqi police, Iraqi army and coalition forces there 24-hours a day looking down the streets, patrolling. And there are smaller -- we've completed 22 combat outposts which are smaller versions of these joint security stations that are in the neighborhoods.

So, it's a really good mix right now of the capability of local Iraqi units that have the native skills and the cultural awareness working with our troops as well. And you know, instead of commuting to the fight the way that we were doing before where we coming off of these large forward operating bases, commuting into town, doing our operations and then going back is a substantial change. And that reflects the approach that General Petraeus, as, you know, one of the major authors of our counterinsurgency manual, has taken. You can't commute to the war. You've got to get close to the people. And you have to understand the fact that the people are truly the center of gravity in a counterinsurgency.

There's a much higher level of political commitment on the part of the Iraqi government and also a much greater emphasis on economics, recovery, basic services and, you know, getting normal life going again. And our metric for success really is the security that the people of Baghdad feel in terms of being able to live their lives and so forth.

So, it's very early in this operation. We're not -- you know, we're not even half way through the flow of the additional forces. And I think with that, I'll probably open it up and give you all a chance to ask some questions.

MODERATOR: All right, so thank you very much.

Bill Roggio, you were first online, so why don't you go first.

Q Sure.

Admiral Fox, I wondered, can you follow up with some questions on Tall Afar?

ADM. FOX: Sure.

Q Okay, great. The attacks in Tall Afar -- do we know if these were local police, or were they INP that was brought in, you know, say from Baghdad or elsewhere? And I've got a couple of just real quick follow-up questions on that.

ADM. FOX: To my knowledge, they were local police. But in fact, the response, you know -- there have been essentially some sectarian activity on the part, that we assess, on the part of some of the police up there. And I don't have a real clear picture of that, but basically off-duty policemen have been taken off. You know, they've been detained. The Iraqi army is in charge of the security up there. So, there is a bad news, good news story. The bad news is there was some sectarian activity that we think can be attributed to some of the police up in Tall Afar after this really high visibility and, you know, gross attack. The dump truck we estimate was carrying between 7,000 and 10,000 pounds of explosives. And as I said, there were 83 people killed and 140 wounded. So, that's the bad news. The good news is there were Iraqi police up there. They did stop a second dump truck bomb and in fact the Iraqi army and -- oh, by the way, there are a number of high-level government of Iraq officials that have gone up to Tall Afar to ensure that, you know, there's a restrained response and, you know, the situation is being handled well by the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police now that are actually handling the situation. But there have been some Iraqi police up there that, you know, have essentially been detained and taken off of their responsibilities as policemen based on their activities.

Q Do we know the number of them? And also, there's reports that they've been released already, even though they've been accused of the crime. Do you have any information on that?

ADM. FOX: I don't have any additional information. The number that I've seen was like 14 but the total -- I have not heard that they've been released.

Q Okay. I think the Associated Press is reporting that. Okay, thank you very much, Admiral Fox.

MODERATOR: Okay, let's see, Richard Fernandez.

Q Yes, Admiral Fox, I was wondering if the effects of the security operation have caused any people to switch sides within the Iraqi government. Has it had an effect on the political balance within the Iraqi government?

ADM. FOX: I think it's too early to tell right now. As you may have seen in the media, there have been rumors and discussions about Prime Minister Maliki shaking up his cabinet. You know, he's been -- it's an interesting situation. The man is growing, in my view. In my personal opinion, you can see him growing in the job. He's absolutely steadfast and unwavering in his approach to this in terms of demanding an even-handed and nonsectarian administration of the rule of law. And you can see that from some of the detentions of some high-level people that, quite frankly, you know, six months or a year ago we wouldn't have seen.

So there's some good signs in regards to the even-handedness of the approach of the Iraqi government. That said, there are discussion points. And we know that there

have been, you know, cabinet members that -- oh, by the way, Prime Minister Maliki didn't get to choose his cabinet. You know, I mean, it was basically by party line that certain cabinets were filled. And so there had been some talk of cabinet shakeup. It hasn't come to fruition quite yet.

The actual -- what we're seeing right now, in fact, is -- I would describe as a war between extremists. And so you have extremist elements both on the far -- you know, the rogue JEM end of the spectrum and then AQI on another spectrum. And these extremist elements on warring on each other, using the innocent people of both moderate Shi'a and moderate Sunnis as the battleground, if you will.

And you actually see some cases of, for example, AQI attacking a moderate Sunni politician like the deputy prime minister, Zawbai, who a week ago -- it'll be a week last Friday -- when he was in Friday prayers, and all the indications were that it was an al Qaeda AQI attack against him, against a Sunni figure in the government of Iraq. And then, on the other hand, you see elements of rogue JEM attacking moderate Shi'a politicians. For example, the Sadr City mayor recently was attacked in Sadr City by, we assess to be, rogue elements of JEM.

So these people don't -- you know, when you say it's even sectarian, it's not, because they're attacking people of their own sect. There's a lot of intra- and inter-attacks that are going on from these really extreme elements, and they're using members, innocent members of Iraqi society, as the middle ground, really, for them to create these high-visibility attacks to foment distrust and the desire to spark further sectarian violence to derail the progress of moving forward for both the Iraqi people and their government.

So we have not seen any specific government of Iraq shifts to date in terms of, you know, substantive or meaningful changes, but it's one of those cases where I do expect, in due course, there will be -- you know, the prime minister has been talking about this for a while.

Q Thank you.

ADM. FOX: Does that answer your question?

Q It sure does. Thanks.

MODERATOR: All right, Charlie -- (inaudible).

Q Yes. Admiral, in Khalilzad's farewell speech, he talked about the value to a diplomat of having some outside pressure, but the need to strike a balance between the pressure to come up with a settlement and the patience to -- (inaudible) -- out long enough.

Do you think we have enough time to get done what needs to get done, or there'll just be too much pressure to have us pull out with stuff going on in Washington and

Congress, where they're passing timetables and so forth? They seem to be getting more and more support for their withdrawal plan. Do we have enough time to get this done?

ADM. FOX: Boy, that's the \$64,000 question, isn't it? Now, it's clear that the Washington clock and the London clock is ticking faster than the Baghdad clock. And we have been very -- this is a -- nothing happens quickly over here in this region, and it's going to require a real patient approach, in my view.

As we said, we've been intentionally focusing on being conservative and cautious about assessing some good times that we've seen early on this because we don't want to -- we want to be in the position of essentially underpromising and overdelivering, if you will, in terms of how the security situation shakes out. And it's going to take time.

So that's a really good question that I, quite frankly, I don't know how it's going to work out other than the fact that I have a great sense of -- I have great confidence in the president, as the commander in chief, and in the common sense of the American people that somehow things have a way of working themselves out here. But it's going to be -- it's a very interesting situation.

The people over here -- in fact, I was with a group of the people who work for me last night, and I put it to them. I asked them, "Are you all distracted, or do you have any issues or anything in regards to the political debate that's going on in the United States right now?"

And it was interesting to hear, especially -- we have a mission to do, and a lot of the -- politicians will say and do what politicians will say and do. That still doesn't change our mission. And we've got to -- you know, the president has been very clear about the mission that he's assigned us. And until that mission is redefined or changed, then that's what we're focused on.

I think that's kind of a -- it's a reflection of the fact that an all-volunteer force tends to be more mature and have a -- I mean, we've got a solid demographic of really great Americans. I mean, I've heard them now referred in two or three days in a row of the next-greatest generation. And I really agree with that. They're all volunteers.

They're serving really selflessly and just really -- it makes you feel good to be an American, to serve with the troops over here, because the closer you get to the troops here, and, in fact, the closer that -- you know, I deal a lot with senior Iraqi members of the government, with the national security advisers; I've talked to the prime minister's chief of staff and to a number of senior Iraqi officials.

And, you know, you have to remember that this government is less than a year old, and they are -- we're asking them to do things that, in our normal budget cycle or something, would be extremely difficult. You know, when you talk about in the Iraqi government case of, you know, de-Ba'athification or the hydrocarbon laws or these big election laws and that sort of thing, somebody was -- we were talking yesterday about it

would be the equivalent of us tackling health care and statehood for Washington, D.C. in one congressional session or something. I mean, they're dealing with some enormously large issues here in the Iraqi government. And quite frankly, they're making some fairly good progress, considering how young the government really is.

MODERATOR: All right. And Sean (sp).

Q Admiral Fox, thanks for your time today.

ADM. FOX: Sean (sp), I'm glad to be with you.

Q I write for Defense Technology International. And I'm curious to know, particularly in your role, in your communications role, what technology do you have that is helping you do your job? And what would help you to do that even more?

ADM. FOX: Well, in my -- I'm in an interesting position now as a guy that's been an operator all of his life, now dealing with the media. It's interesting. The most recent example I'll point to of something that's technological that -- or, you know, it's more of a communications state of the art, is we now have a YouTube site that -- you know, I've got some young people that work for me that are far more fluent than I am in terms of the current -- you know, the state of the art of modern technology, if you will. I'm kind of the I-like-to-read-the-newspaper-and-write-on-yellow-legal-pads generation. And, you know, my children are the one that works on my computer for me.

But, that said, these young people that are working for me said, "Hey, you know, we will (vet ?) media, things to show for newscasts or something like that, video, Predator video, interesting things." And it's up there for one news cycle or one and a half news cycles, and then it's gone. And there's a demand for "Hey, can we figure out a way to look at this repeatedly?" Well, YouTube gives you that opportunity.

And so these young people, you know, came along and they said, "Hey, we'll set this up." And we have a YouTube channel account. And, you know, we just started it earlier this month, and the thing has just taken off. It's just been really remarkable to see exactly how that thing has taken off. So there's an example of technology that we're just using.

And it's a way, in our view, to allow middle America to just access things that are interesting or eye-catching or technology. You know, you get to see, you know, for example, Predator video or night-vision goggle technology or something like that. And anyway, or -- for example, last week there was the opening of a radio station up in Diyala of a couple of young Shi'a and a couple of young Sunnis who are working well together and striving for a free Iraq.

So we're sharing that type of stuff over this YouTube thing. And I'll give you the YouTube address if you all don't mind listening to this. But it's something that's interesting, and we're posting this thing and it's just taken off like gangbusters. The

address is www.youtube.com/mnfiraq -- with no punctuation. And then of course, you can also link it by going to our website at www.mnf-iraq.com and either one of those things will take you to the website or to the YouTube site and you can -- you know, I think we're for new subscribers, we're something in the -- we're definitely in the top 20. I think we're like number 16 or something now.

So there's an example of something that just in the free market kind of thing -- the technology piece -- I can speak from my old life in terms of seeing the technology that's changed over time in terms of the airplanes that I flew and the weapons that we deployed, but that's not really relevant to my job here as a communications guy in the Multi-National Force-Iraq.

Do you have any follow up on that or did I answer -- I mean, is that --

Q No. That's good.

ADM. FOX: I'm operator now living in a communicator's world. So I'm using -- you know, I'm talking to the media and talking to people like you on how to share the story as opposed to going around flying airplanes and shooting things up.

Q Right. Thank you. I appreciate that answer. Thank you.

ADM. FOX: All right. Did anyone else join us? Did everyone have a chance to ask a question?

Q Can I ask a real quick question -- follow-up question? This is Bill.

ADM. FOX: Sure.

Q Admiral Fox, you mentioned there is 28 JSS -- the joint security stations and 22 COPs --

ADM. FOX: That's right.

Q -- at outposts. Earlier, I think it was Major General Caldwell, had said there would be 70 JSS established in Baghdad. Is this sort of a joint JSS-COP type thing, or?

ADM. FOX: Correct. When we talk about the total number of approximately 70 is a combination of the joint security stations and combat outposts. And the distinction between the joint security stations and the combat outposts, really, is size. A JSS is essentially -- is a larger facility, if you will. And it comprises, essentially, the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi police and the coalition force. And it's a visible presence to the community that they're in and it's a command-and-control element and it directs all of the security force operations in conjunction with that joint security station within a given area. In fact, all 10 districts in Baghdad now have gotten one form or another of the joint security stations, to include Sadr City.

A combat outpost is a smaller version of the joint security station. And as I said, there's 22 of them and they do not have all three elements -- coalition, Iraqi police and Iraqi army. So it would be one or two of the total combination -- not all three -- just based on size.

Q Would coalition be there in the COPs, though?

ADM. FOX: They could be. So it's not that clearly defined. It's basically less than all three, but some subset of police, Iraqi army and/or coalition.

Q At the JSS are they conducting like CMOC activities as well? Are they being coordinated through the JSS as opposed to the COPs, where it's just strictly a security station?

ADM. FOX: It's a security station, but you know, the Baghdad Operation Center is the overall Iraqi command and control piece of this. And then we -- the United States or the American coalition partners here -- we have our own parallel command and control structure. So America and our coalition forces are not under the command and control authority of the Iraqi security forces, but they're working very closely together. We have liaison officers and, you know, essentially folks that working right alongside the Iraqi in the command and control process.

Q My apologies. When I meant CMOC, I meant like civil affairs activities. Are they being --

ADM. FOX: Oh, oh. I see.

Q -- through the JSS?

ADM. FOX: I see what you mean. Yeah, well, I mean there's -- actually, it's combination of both the civil affairs, but there's also the provincial reconstruction teams. There's one here in Baghdad as well. And as I mentioned before, there's a much higher level of emphasis on economic activity, reconstruction, civil military operations. So there's essentially, from our perspective, the core is the large organization that orchestrates all that. And then the Multinational Division Baghdad -- MND-Baghdad -- is in fact -- that's what this additional headquarters element that's coming in is going to be essentially taking a southern posture here so we've got more headquarter capability to command and control all of these forces that are going into the Baghdad region.

Q Great. Thank you very much, Admiral Fox.

ADM. FOX: My pleasure.

MODERATOR: All right, sir. We are out of time here. Were there any closing comments?

ADM. FOX: Well, I'd like to just, first of all, say thanks to you all. It's really a great thing to be able to talk to you all and also communicate effectively and directly with a segment of this new world here that is so effective in articulating and expressing the message. And I appreciate the opportunity to spend this time with you all.

And then secondly, I would emphasize how much we appreciate the support of the American people. We understand that there's a political process and people do a lot of arm waving and that sort of thing, but we also understand that there's a tremendous level of support for the American armed forces and the military members that are serving over here. And I'd like to just say thank you. You'd be really proud of your sons and daughters -- to see the young people that are serving over here. As I said, they're the next greatest generation and it's an honor to be part of it -- their team.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much for allowing us this time.

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